

**The arts**

The development of creativity and self-expression through the arts is playing an increasingly important role in childhood education. The arts provide many opportunities for growth by allowing children to respond emotionally and creatively to their environment.

Through drama, for example, children are given opportunities to extend themselves into new experiences, new points of view, and new ways of thinking. In our schools children do not usually prepare finished works for an audience (that's theatre), but they do experiment with actions and words. In a relaxed environment in which the emphasis is on self-expression, they learn to overcome shyness and to develop a more sensitive appreciation of their language and confidence in their ability to communicate.

Through art, children can also express their thoughts and feelings about themselves and their world. In teaching artistic techniques, teachers rely on example, imitation, and discussion, but avoid interfering with the child's interpretation or design. Of course, children need little encouragement to look, listen, taste, touch, and imagine; by working with materials such as wood, clay, metal, plastic, paper, and paint, they learn to clarify their perceptions for themselves and to communicate them to others.

**Physical education**

Self-expression is also encouraged in physical education through the medium of movement. In the earlier years at school, stress is laid on the development of versatility. Children become involved in a range of activities such as gymnastics, games, swimming, dance, and drama, with ample time provided for practice. These and other activities offer endless opportunities for developing both confidence and body control. Team games foster a co-operative attitude and a healthy competitive spirit.

The Ministry of Education encourages regular physical education classes for every child in Ontario. Some schools also offer daily fitness activities to supplement the regular physical education program. Physical fitness programs not only help to develop positive attitudes and skills, but can also combat such problems as obesity, poor motor control, and stress.

**Environmental studies**

Educators use the world with which the child is familiar as a basis for the development of values, attitudes, concepts, and skills.

By investigating various aspects of their social and scientific environment, children not only gain an insight into the complex nature of our world, but also become aware of overall patterns and of the interdependence of its various parts. In this way, the schools help children to acquire the information and skills they need to live and prosper in a society of many cultures. By building a foundation for informed and rational attitudes and decisions, they prepare them for life in a world in which all participants are increasingly affected by each other's needs and actions.

**How Parents Can Become Involved**

Without question, you are the best-informed expert on the subject of your child. As such, you are in a position to offer the teacher valuable insights as well as assistance when problems arise. But there is no need to wait for problems; if you are concerned, confused, or merely curious about your child's education, arrange a meeting with the principal or teacher. You might also choose to become an active member of the parent-teacher group in your community. Most of the members, like yourself, are concerned parents who believe in a team approach to elementary education. You should be part of that team. Ask questions and make your views known.

In your school, parents may also be welcomed as volunteers. You might be asked to help in the classroom, to work in the library, to assist on field trips, or to supervise after-hours activities. And if you have a special skill — don't hesitate to offer it!

**More Information**

Other pamphlets in this series tell more about education in Ontario. For copies, please contact:

Ministry of Education  
Communication Services Branch  
Queen's Park  
Mowat Block, 14th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1L2  
Telephone: (416) 965-6407

Toll-free calling may be available in your area. Please check the blue pages of your telephone book.

# EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS TODAY

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## **Education in Elementary Schools Today**

### **How to Enrol Your Child in School**

Every year about 125 000 Ontario children enrol in elementary school for the first time. Students in Ontario's publicly supported elementary schools, English or French, are not required to pay fees. ("Private" or "independent" schools do charge fees.)

By law, children between the ages of six and sixteen must attend school. The school year begins in September, on the first Tuesday after Labour Day, and ends in the last week of June.

Any child who turns six before the first day of school must start Grade 1 in September. Those who turn six *after* the first day of school, but before December 31, may also begin in September, if parents so wish.

Senior kindergartens, offered by most school boards, accept children who will turn five by the end of December. Junior kindergartens, where available, accept children whose fourth birthday comes before the end of the calendar year. There are many local variations in these procedures.

Children may sometimes be excused from regular school attendance with the consent of the provincial school counsellor. For example, the child may be unable to attend school because of illness or because the school is not within a reasonable distance of his or her home and no transportation is provided by the school board. The fact that a youngster is blind, deaf, or mentally disabled does not, in itself, excuse him or her from school attendance.

To enrol your child for school, watch for registration day, which is usually in the spring. The date is announced in local papers and is available from your local school board office. If you miss registration day or arrive in Ontario in the middle of a school year, contact your local school board as soon as possible.

To register your child, you must submit documents giving proof of the child's age. Your school board will tell you what is required — usually a birth certificate, baptismal certificate, or passport. To obtain birth certificates for children born in Ontario, write to the Registrar General, Queen's Park, Macdonald Block, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y5 for an application form. If your child was born elsewhere in Canada, contact the province of birth.

When a student transfers from a school outside Ontario, his or her grade placement is determined by the principal of the new school on the basis of past records — record cards, transcripts, or diplomas.

For more information about starting school, contact your local principal or school board.

### **Early Identification of Learning Abilities**

All school boards have adopted procedures whose aim is to identify children's learning strengths and needs as early as possible. In this way, the schools are able to provide educational experiences that are closely related to the individual child's level of development and unique background. This practice is not only sound pedagogically, but it also helps to reinforce the child's self-image as an individual who can learn.

Early identification procedures include the preparation of a health and/or social history, regular educational assessment by the teacher, and appropriate follow-up programs.

### **The Goals of Education in the Elementary Years**

The early years of education are of crucial importance, for they shape a child's attitude to learning and provide the basic skills and motivation for progress in later years.

For these reasons, the curriculum in the elementary years is designed to provide opportunities for *every* child to develop to the limit of his or her potential.

Ontario schools make a particular effort to avoid limiting educational opportunity through sex-role stereotyping. Teachers endeavour to create an intellectual atmosphere in which boys feel free to participate in home economics classes and girls in woodworking classes, to mention two examples. Programs are also modified to meet the needs of children with learning or other disabilities.

### **Communication skills**

In the elementary years, Ontario schools aim to provide children with opportunities to experience and experiment with as many means of communication as possible in an attempt to extend and refine their skills of self-expression. Students are encouraged to find their own style of communication as they interact with their world and to interpret their ideas and feelings to others.

Throughout the early years, the primary concern of the school is to develop the child's ability to speak and write. Because young children need models for their writing, teachers often read to them from authors whose work provides an illustration of the effective use of language, description, and plot. Older children learn to speak and write with greater precision and fluency by studying more sophisticated examples of good writing. Our rich heritage of prose and poetry remains one of the best resources for helping children to develop their innate sensitivity and creativity. Equally important, children are encouraged to observe grammatical rules in order to achieve precision of expression and clarity of thought.

### **Arithmetic**

Despite the widespread use of pocket calculators and other computing devices, children still need to understand and practise the skills of computation and to acquire some basic knowledge of mathematical principles. Students are encouraged to do simple calculations mentally and to work out solutions to more complex problems in writing. One of the teacher's principal goals is to teach children an efficient method of mastering and practising such skills as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Teachers are, however, careful to avoid overpractice which can lead to boredom and an aversion to the study of mathematics.

Games and activities of many kinds are used to motivate and reinforce arithmetic skills. In keeping with the federal government's policy of metric conversion, metric units of measurement are commonly used in Ontario schools.